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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000453

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SUBJECT: KABILA'S FORMER CHIEF OF STAFF LAMENTS PRESIDENT'S ISOLATION

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Garvelink for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Ambassador met on April 30 with Kikaya Bin Karubi, former Private Secretary to President Kabila and current ambassador-designate to the United Kingdom, for a wide-ranging and candid discussion. Topics discussed included Freeport McMoRan's status, the background and aftermath of the Kamerhe crisis, the upcoming cabinet reshuffle, DRC-Rwandan relations, General Ward's recent visit and behind-the-scenes dynamics at the presidency. Karubi believes that advisor Augustin Katumba had become the only point of access to the president, resulting in Kabila's isolation from foreign leaders. End summary.

Economic and Business Issues

¶2. (C) During an April 30 meeting with Ambassador, DCM, and PolOff, Kikaya Bin Karubi, former Private Secretary to President Kabila, Fulbright scholar to the United States (M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Boston University), and current ambassador-designate to the United Kingdom, said that he tried to convince President Kabila to do more to attract U.S. businesses to the DRC. He noted that Freeport McMoRan (unlike other companies which he described as "cowboys" coming to the DRC only to try to make money quickly) has a long-term vision of its operations in the country. The ambassador stressed that the global financial crisis has seriously affected Freeport and, without positive movement from the GDRC on the contract, the company cannot continue to justify its DRC operations when it is laying off workers in the United States. The ambassador also noted that, generally, U.S. businesses want to come to the DRC, but are hesitant due to the investment and security climates.

The Kamerhe Affair

¶3. (C) Karubi said that the recent saga with former National Assembly President Vital Kamerhe was due to Kamerhe's excessive ambition. He underlined that the Kabila family was responsible for Kamerhe's rise in power over the years, implying that Kamerhe owed Kabila his loyalty. Karubi stressed that it would not have been difficult to obtain parliamentary support for the joint operations with the Rwandans, as it would have aroused too many negative emotions. Flatly denying that Kamerhe was caught unawares when the operation against the FDLR began, Karubi maintained that Kabila had briefed Kamerhe directly on the matter.

¶4. (C) Kamerhe is currently in South Africa and will soon travel to the UK, Karubi said, possibly to consider his next political move. However, if Kamerhe is thinking about

challenging Kabila by force, he needs to be prepared to go into permanent exile, "otherwise the cemetery of Gombe is nearby." Disconcertingly, he stressed that political figures and parties in Africa require a military force to be successful, pointing to the fact that in the previous presidential election, it came down to the two sides which had militias. "Non-violence does not work here," Karubi said. "This isn't the U.S., UK, or France."

15. (C) Karubi said that, in the aftermath of the Kamerhe drama, the majority has solidified its control in Parliament. The opposition, by contrast, lacks a good leader. He noted that parliamentary debates are no longer televised, because legislators tended to play to the cameras.

Cabinet Reshuffle

16. (C) Karubi affirmed that the CNDP will be represented in the new cabinet, although it is difficult to know when it will be formed. Joseph Nzanga Mobutu's UDEMO party is likely to be the loser in this reshuffle. Prime Minister Muzito will keep his job until 2011, given the need for allies from the western part of the country. The ruling clique is not popular in Kinshasa, Karubi admitted; for that reason it would have been preferable to find a Prime Minister from the capital city. But, as no one fits the bill, Kabila is trying to win over the local population in other ways -- money coming from Chinese contracts, for instance, is going in part to build roads in Kinshasa.

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DRC-Rwanda Relations

17. (C) Karubi opined that the Rwandans might simply be holding Nkunda "like a dog on a leash," ready to put him back into action if necessary. Despite this and the troubled history between the two countries, he claimed that he had pressed Kabila years ago to talk to Kagame. It was his phone that Kagame's office would call when trying to reach Kabila, Karubi said.

18. (C) The GDRC is now trying to find a suitable ambassador to post to Kigali. Kabila wants the new DRC ambassador to be a woman, for "charm" purposes; he does not want to send someone with a security or military background. The GDRC has evicted squatters on the site of the Rwandan Embassy in Kinshasa and will pay for the damages to the premises. Without elaborating, Karubi said that the proposed Rwandan Ambassador to Kinshasa is problematic because he is himself Congolese, not Rwandan (Note: Radio Okapi reported on May 7 that the Rwandan Government had named Amandin Rugira as its new ambassador to Kinshasa. In a May 7 meeting with PolCouns and PolOff, the Head of the MFA's Africa and Middle East Office said that the GDRC had submitted a name for the DRC ambassadorship in Kigali to the Presidency for approval. End Note).

AFRICOM ...and Staff Problems at the Presidency

19. (C) Karubi claimed that he told Kabila that AFRICOM represents an opportunity for the DRC to play a central role within Africa. He said he told the president that no one will attack the DRC if it is seen as a friend of the United States. The ambassador then raised the point that, not only had no meeting taken place between General Ward and President Kabila during the former's recent trip to Kinshasa, no one at the Presidency had provided the embassy with any information about the likelihood of such a meeting, despite multiple attempts to contact high-level presidential aides and advisors. Karubi promised to bring up this issue with Kabila.

110. (C) Karubi recounted that a recent high-level UK

Government visitor had faced the same problem. He said he stressed in vain to presidency staff the importance of the meeting. Then, he simply called Kabila directly, who questioned why he needed to meet with the visitor. Karubi claimed that this dynamic stemmed from last year's drama vis-a-vis Belgian Foreign Minister De Gucht; Kabila, hurt from that episode, does not want to be browbeaten again by foreign officials. According to Karubi, there is, however, a related problem: Augustin Katumba Mwanke, behind-the-scenes informal advisor to Kabila, has successfully isolated Kabila from everyone else, who in turn do not really have any access to the president. Katumba is appointing people loyal to him, not to the president.

¶11. (C) Comment: Fluent in English and comfortable around Americans, Karubi treated us to a level of candor unusual among Congolese officials, which in and of itself helped to demonstrate his own power and influence. He clearly views himself as particularly close to the president, going so far as to (diplomatically) backhand Katumba Mwanke and gossiping that most Presidential advisors, such as Seraphin Ngwej, do not actually have any access to Kabila. However, his remarks about the ineffectiveness of non-violence, glib remarks about Kamerhe's safety, and matter-of-fact dismissal of transparency vis a vis Parliament, likewise provide an enlightening, if disconcerting, glimpse into what are probably common views about the nature of politics among the political elite in Kinshasa, although most would never dare to speak so bluntly about these issues to us. End comment.

GARVELINK